

## [Old Time Dance Calls]

Form A

Circumstances of Interview

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker A. C. Sherbert Date December 27, 1938.

Address Project Office, 614 SW Eleventh Ave., Portland, Oregon.

Subject Old Time Dance Calls.

Name and address of informant George Duffy,

5605 SE 71st Avenue, Portland, Oregon.

Date and time of interview December 15, 9:00 p.m., December 16, 20, 27.

Place of interview Swiss Hall 12/15 - Catholic Truth Soc., 12/16 12/20 12/27

Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant

Office files.

Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you None.

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Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Principal interviews obtained in office room on second floor of Catholic Truth Society building, 2053 SW Sixth Ave. The Catholic Truth Society operates a printing and publishing plant in the building, printing religious tracts and pamphlets and also publishing a religious paper, The Catholic Sentinel. The room in which informant marks is a repository for the back files of the Catholic Sentinel. Informant is at present doing research work in these files for the federal government Historical Records Survey. Room in plain and simply furnished with flat table-desk and two chairs.

Form B

Personal History of Informant

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

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Address Project Office, 614 SW Eleventh Ave., Portland, Oregon.

Subject Old Time Dance Calls.

Name and address of informant George Duffy,

5605 SE 71st Avenue, Portland, Oregon.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

1. Ancestry
2. Place and date of birth

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3. Family
4. Places lived in, with dates
5. Education, with dates
6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
7. Special skills and interests
8. Community and religious activities
9. Description of informant
10. Other points gained in interview

1. Bernard and Mary Duffy, born in County Louth[,?] Ireland.
2. Peoria, Illinois, January 27, 1875.
3. Three girls and two boys living - oldest son killed in France with A. E. F.
4. Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, California, Washington, Oregon - Dates not remembered. (Boomer printer.)
5. High School in Marysville, Mo., graduated 1890. Attended business college following high school - Northwest Business College of Missouri, Marysville, Mo.
6. Printers editor and publisher. Operated newspaper in Nebraska 1900 to 1906. Superintendent of printing plants in various places at various times. Managed show poster plant in Spokane, Washington at one time.

Information obtained should supply the following facts:

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1. Ancestry
  2. Place and date of birth
  3. Family
  4. Places lived in, with dates
  5. Education, with dates
  6. Occupations and accomplishments with dates
  7. Special skills and interests
  8. Community and religious activities
  9. Description of informant
  10. Other points gained in interview
7. Experienced public speaker, fraternal [organizer?], dance-hall manager. Was state organizer in Colorado for Security Benefit Association.
8. None.
9. Medium height, chunky build, graying dark hair thin at top. Pleasing personality and presence, engaging smile.
10. - - -

Form C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

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Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker A. C. Sherbert Date 12/27/38

Address Project Office, 614 SW Eleventh Avenue, Portland, Oregon

Subject Old Time Dance Calls

Name and address of informant George Duffy, 5605 SE 71st Ave[.,?] City.

Text:

I have been an enthusiastic follower of the dance, ball-room dancing I mean, since I was a boy of fifteen, and that's a good many years ago. As might be supposed, I have seen a great many changes in dance technique, dance forms, and dance-ball conduct during the past half century.

In early days dancing was not the commercialized proposition that it is today. It was not a business in any sense of the word. Dancing was purely a neighborhood social event with profit no consideration and was indulged in by mostly all classes of people, excepting the followers of one or two religious groups that thought it sinful to dance.

As with all things people enjoy doing, it was discovered that money could be raised by charging admission to the dance. First to benefit were charitable causes, church purposes, (yes, church purposes) and other community needs. From there it was a short step to commercialization and the public dance hall was the result. At first, though, public dance halls were found only in the larger centers. Later, small towns had their public dances in which anyone 2 could participate who felt willing to pay the price of admission.

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Like everything else about which things are written, I suppose there are shelves of books giving the history of dancing, what dancing symbolizes, where and when dancing originated, why people want to dance, and other information regarding [the?] subject. I have read none of [these?] books, but from my own personal observations, I have decided that folks want to dance for the same reason that folks want to listen to music, read poetry, or witness or engage in other forms of emotional expression. Dancing is rhythmic just like poetry or music and has the further attraction of stimulating physical activity, mingling the sexes, and sociability. Then there is usually excitement and fun at a dance, and this fact, too, makes an evening of dancing more than ordinarily attractive to all persons who are not too definitely anti-social.

I guess dancing is as old to civilization - maybe older. Every country on the face of the earth has its dance forms. Even the savage tribes perform dances that are more or less intricate - and usually symbolic or ritualistic. Dancing is mentioned in the Bible and I have read of dancing being indulged in long before the Christian era. I may be wrong, but I do not believe the dance of today is of any great social importance. Automobiles and moving pictures have supplanted the community dance as a means of bringing young folks together, in my opinion. In other words, I truly think all dancing could today be abolished and the social world would move along quite as well without it. Such may not be said of the old time dance. The dance - especially the country dance - was an almost indispensable institution in those days.

Perhaps I can give you a short description of a typical farm dance of the eighties or nineties[.?.]

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The farmer boy, a brawny lad of nineteen or so, arose at daybreak the day this particular dance was to be held. He did his chores before breakfast, milking, feeding stock, etc. At breakfast the night's dance is mentioned at the table. He is asked if he plans to take Sally - he's been going steady with Sally - to the dance. Yep, he and Sally's going. After

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breakfast he goes out and perhaps follows a plow all day in the back forty. After putting in a good dozen hours at hard labor, he comes in for supper and stows away a hearty meal. Then comes the night chores, which are mostly a duplication of the before-breakfast ones. Chores done, he begins the process of slicking [up?] to go out - removing most of the odor of the stable from his person with [copious?] dousings of hot water from the wood range reservoir, and a lather of home-made lye soup. Turned out ready to meet Sally, the young man was really a wholesome specimen of husky, healthy manhood. His soap-slick face shone like a beacon by reflected light from the coal-oil lantern which he carried as he went down to the barn to hitch up the "rig" that was to take Sally and him to the dance. His face was red leather from working out-doors in wind and weather. But his smile was genuine, his [step?] elastic and his vigor undiminished by the hard day's work which had gone before.

In a flurry of gravel flirled from the wheels of his one-seater "Democrat" buggy, our young dance [enthusiast?] drives rapidly down the lane of the home place and is soon thudding along the high road bound for Sally's home, two miles distant. Sally, tingling with anticipation, steps out demurely and takes her place beside her escort in the buggy. Sally was decked out voluminously and believe us it took the clip from numerous sheep to clothe her. No job for one or two silk worms as it is today.

The dance is to celebrate a barn raising and is to be held at a farm some fifteen or sixteen miles from Sally's home. No distance at all these days in a 4 streamlined coupe, but in those days it was quite a distance. They didn't mind, though, and the time passed pleasantly in song, laughter and harmless gossip, and perhaps there were occasional, rememberable intervals during which the lines were wrapped around the whipstock and the horse followed his nose.

Arriving at the dance later than many, they find a long line of horses and buggies tied to fence rails and hitching racks. The shrill tones of a rapidly bowed fiddle and the lusty commands of the "caller" break the soft silence of the surrounding countryside. Thin

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fingers of mellow lantern-light filter through chinks and knot-holes of the new barn in which the dance is being held. Our farm boy and his Sally enter the barn and are greeted by cheery nods of welcome and recognition all around. A quadrille is in progress. The music is not furnished by a smooth, sleek group of tuxedo-clad professionals with two, three, and four hundred dollar instruments. The music here consists of the best available neighborhood fiddler assisted by another neighbor who can "chord" on the [melodson?] - without benefit of notes. Correct time is maintained by the thumping of the fiddler's boot on the hard floor, by the gyrations of his shoulders as he scrapes his fiddle, and by the vigorous nodding of his head in proper tempo. The fiddler's boot thumping is augmented in volume by the [concerted?] foot tapping of small boys who sit on the benches that line the dance floor.

The fiddler and dance caller were colorful and picturesque individuals who, if they excelled in their abilities, were not without considerable repute and importance in their respective neighborhoods. A colorful fiddler knew how to draw attention to himself and to liven the proceedings by clowning a bit as he fiddled. Some fiddlers could toss their fiddles into the air or flip them upside down without losing a beat. Others made a specialty of waving their fiddles backward over their heads while playing just to prove their complete mastery of the instrument. The callers more usually glib fellows of likeable personality and strong of lung. The best callers were ones who could improvise [new?] figures or movements for the dancers, though in a pinch almost any young dance [follower?] of the neighborhood could be drafted into service and do a very creditable job of calling. There were a number of standard dances popular in the '80s and '90s - the schottische, the minuet, the polka, the Virginia reel and others, but the most popular by far was the quadrille. The quadrille had almost as many variations as there were callers to call them and couples to dance them, and new calls constantly filtered in from other localities. They all followed, however, a fairly regular pattern. The quadrille usually consisted of five figures, movements, or changes, executed by four couples, each couple occupying one side of a square, giving rise to the name by which this dance was commonly called, "the square dance". Four couples



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comprised a set. There were as many sets on the floor simultaneously as the size of the floor would accommodate and each set followed the commands of the caller in unison. Here, I believe, is where the expressions, "our set," "he doesn't belong to our set," and similar folk terms originated.

Let us watch the dance for a moment. The couples mingle, moving back and forth in response to the directions of the caller. The movements, for the most part, require no gentlemen to come in closer proximity to a lady dancer than to hold her hand momentarily as they bow, turn, and [promenade?]. Should it become necessary in the dance for a man to place his hand at a lady's waist, he would find her so completely [corseted?] with whalebone and [steel?], and so clumsily swathed in clothing, that any sensual stimulation resulting from the contact must have been purely psychological.

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Quite different today in any modern dance hall. The modern dance requires no concentration as in listening to a caller's commands. The modern dance seems to consist chiefly of walking around to music, and if you choose not to walk you may stand virtually in one spot, shifting the body's weight from one foot to the other in time to music. The modern miss steps out onto the dance floor clad in a few ounces of wispy material under which she wears a thin, elastic garment so constructed as to reveal every curve and contour of her body. Her partner grasps her in as close an embrace as the none-too-vigilant eyes of the dance-hall management will permit. In the average dance-hall, decorum is maintained by supervision rather than by the individual's desire to behave decorously. Young persons attend present-day dances and frequently dance the entire evening with one partner, leaving the dance at its conclusion without having widened the number of their acquaintances by a single person. In the days of the square dance, a newcomer to the community mingled and danced with all, and when the evening's dancing ended he found himself no longer a stranger. That is why I say ball-room dancing today seems to me to be of slight social significance.

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I give you here a few of the dance calls which remain in my memory and which I have used recently at local dances since the revival a few years ago of the oldtime dances:

7

Quadrille Balance one - balance all eight, Swing on the corner like swinging on a gate; Now swing your own if not too late. Left [alamand?] [md] right to your partner and hand over hands All the way 'round; promenade eight when you get straight. First lady out to right, swing that gent with right hand 'round, Partner by left with left hand 'round, Next gent by right with right hand 'round, Partner by left with left hand 'round, Lady in the [center?] and seven hands 'round. (Circle) Bird hop out and the crow hop in, Seven hands up and around again. Swing him out with a partner swing[.?] Alamand left and grand right and left around. Come to your partner don't be slow, Treat 'em all alike with the double elbow, Hook 'em on the right and back by the left, That is the 'railroad swing'[.?] Come to your partner, promenade to place.

Second Lady ) ) Third Lady ) ) Fourth Lady )

) Same procedure excepting 'railroad swing' [is?] ) eliminated.

8

### Quadrille

(Typical Variation) Honor your partner, now the lady on the left, All join hands and circle to left — Break and swing and promenade back. First couple out to right, four hands half way 'round, Right and left four, right and left six — Then right and left back — Right and left through to side couple; Four hands 'round [md] ladies “do so, gents so lo”. Get your partner and lead to the next (couple). Four hands half 'round, right and left four, Right and left six — right and left back; Then right and left home. Everybody swing your partner, now on the left, With left alamand; right hand your partner And grind right and left. Come to your partner, all promenade.

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Second couple ) Third couple ) Fourth couple )

Same procedure as above.

(After fourth couple has completed routine, all “as you are” for a rest, before executing next change).

9

### Quadrille

(Typical Variation) Right foot up and left foot down, Swing your partner 'round and 'round, Now alamand left — right hand your partner, And grind right and left — come to your partner, Remember the call, Turn 'em 'round and promenade all. (to your places.) First couple out to right, through the center, With lady 'round lady and the gent 'so lo'. Then the lady 'round gent, and the gent don't go. Four hands 'round — 'do so' the lady, and the gent 'so lo.' Get your partner, to the next you go.

(Same as above for remaining couples). Than, balance home, everybody swing, Alamand left, right to your partner And right and left around — Promenade eight when you get straight.

Second couple ) Third couple ) Fourth couple )

Same procedure as above.

10

GRAPEVINE TWIST - QUADRILLE Honer your partner, now lady on the left, All join hands, circle to the left — Alamand left, right your partner and grind right and left; Promenade eight when you get straight. First couple out to couple on right, Four hands 'round, Two and four and six hands 'round — Two and six and eight hands 'round — Break at the head with the 'Grapevine Twist; Gent in the lead...

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(All eight keep going under hands of couples around in circle, until they have passed through all arches as everybody holds hands). Eight hands 'round, alamand left, Right to partner and right and left 'round — Come to your partner, all promenade.

Second couple ) Third couple ) Fourth couple )

Same procedure as above.

11

### Quadrille, or Square Dance.

(One of many variations) Honor your partner and lady on left, All join hands and circle left, Break and swing and promenade to place. First couple cut to right, four hands 'round, Gent, leave that lady and balance to next — Three hands 'round; gent take that lady and go to the next — Four hands 'round, leave that lady and balance home. Forward six and back. Forward again and right and left through — Two lone gents a “[free?] sashay” — Then forward six and back, Forward again and right and left through. Two gents, a free sashay — Alamand left, grind right and left. Come to your partner, remember the call. Turn 'em around and promenade all.

Second Couple ) Third Couple ) Fourth Couple )

Same as above.

12

### Virginia Reel

(Executed with six couples - ladies on one side, gents on other, in lines, partners facing each other across reasonable space), Head gent and foot lady, forward and salute — Head lady and foot gent, forward and salute — Head gent and foot lady — free sashay, Head lady and foot gent — free sashay, Head gent and foot lady, right hand 'round[.?] Head lady and foot gents right hand 'round. Head gent and foot lady, left hand 'round[.?]

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Head lady and foot gent, left hand 'round[.?] Head gent and foot lady, four hand swing,  
Head lady and foot gent, four hand swing.

- - - - - Head couple swings with left hand round, Lady swing next gent and gent next  
lady, with right hand 'round, And partner with left hand 'round. Treat 'em all alike down the  
line — (to end) Head couple promenade the center, all ladies to the right In line and gents  
to left — Head couple form an arch at foot and all pass under.

(Head couple remains at foot). (Same procedure as above until all six couples have gone  
through). Then, forward and salute, and seat your partner.

Form D

Extra Comment

Federal Writers' Project

Works Progress Administration

OREGON FOLKLORE STUDIES

Name of worker A. C. Sherbert Date 12-27-38

Address Project Office, 614 SW Eleventh Ave., Portland, Oregon.

Subject Old Time Dance Calls.

Name and address of informant George Daffy, 5605 SE 71st Ave., City.

Comment: The informant seems to have had a great deal of experience in handling  
dances. At different times he engaged in the operation of dance-halls for a profit and as his  
sole business. At other times he was called upon to manage dances for fraternal societies  
because of his experience and fraternal connections. At all times he seems to have made

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dancing and dance managing his principal extra-time hobby and recreation. The informant appears to have been a keen observer and seems capable of analyzing and interpreting the change in social customs, at least in regard to dancing, which has come about in the past half-century. Many points were brought up in the course of the interview which do not appear in the accompanying text for the reason that they seemed irrelevant to the subject at hand. The unrecorded topics discussed did, however, serve to establish in the mind of the interviewer the impression that the informant spoke with authority on the main text. This, because of experiences concurrent to informant and interviewer.

The informant has other dance calls that he is willing to record for us, upon request and at his convenience.